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SUBJECT: SHILO, OFRA ARE NUCLEI FOR ILLEGAL OUTPOSTS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Poloff visited Shilo and Ofrah, two major settlements north of Ramallah on August 31. Surrounding outposts included Amona, where the GoI destroyed nine permanent structures in February 2006 and where there are now over fifty caravans. There are clusters of caravans on most hilltops surrounding each settlement that are inhabited by young settlers. Several of these outposts are on the GoI's list of 24 outposts being discussed for removal in the near future. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Shilo and Ofrah are both well outside the route of the separation barrier. They are home to settlers motivated primarily by ideology but who also enjoy the economic benefits of settlement life and proximity to Jerusalem. The thirty-year old settlements are growing, largely via hilltop caravan clusters.

Shilo and the Hilltops

13. (C) According to Yisrael "Winkie" Medad, a settler leader and long time ConGen contact, Shilo was established in 1977 "disguised as an archaeological dig" and is believed to be the site of the ancient tabernacle. Today, there is an ongoing excavation of two fourth century Byzantine churches with spectacularly preserved mosaic tile floors. Shilo has 250 families (an estimated 20 percent of them American). Medad said in the last three years, some forty new families have moved to Shilo, while only ten have left.

14. (C) Medad told PolOff that Shilo's relationship with the neighboring Arab village of Turmusayya (population 3000 and 30 percent American) has soured after two Intifadas. Asked about permanent status issues, Medad said Shilo residents "don't think in those terms," but they do want an underground tunnel connecting Shilo to the larger settlement of Eli to the North and another underground tunnel connecting Eli and the Ariel settlement, inside the route of the separation barrier.

15. (C) Medad showed PolOff caravans at the outposts Achiya, Adead, Kedat, and Esh Kodesh, which are on the hilltops east of Shilo and "attached" to the settlement. He said they house young and newlywed settlers and usually rent for about USD 100 monthly. According to Medad, the outposts are on land legally "zoned" for Shilo and are supported by the larger settlement.

Ofrah and Amona

16. (C) Poloff visited Ofrah with Ruchie Avital, the settlement's spokeswoman and a resident since 1986. According to Avital, Gush Emunim developed Ofrah in 1976, and

the settlement now has 500 families and additional outlying hilltop outposts. Two of the outposts, Ofrah East and Ofrah Southeast, are on the GoI list of 24 outposts that were established after March 2001 and that are being discussed for removal.

17. (C) PolOff and Avital visited Amona outpost, where the GoI removed nine permanent structures in February 2006 and which now has over fifty caravans. PolOff saw nine large piles of rebar and chopped concrete left after the 2006 GoI action and that Avital said inspire the settlers to continue their activities at Amona. PolOff saw young settlers constructing a settlement movement museum housed in two caravans, toured a new sheep farm with some thirty sheep and visited an outlook gazebo with plexiglass horizon maps that was recently completed by Ofrah youth. Avital claimed the GOI will not allow Amona additional caravans, and called the GoI's 2006 actions "evil and twisted," but said life there is "thriving."

WALLES